

The Gift From Jesus is Each Other

Jesus said:

"...But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the world..."

After we moved up here to SLO County from Southern California, my grandmother would come to visit. She arrived and then departed by plane. It was a really big deal to go to the airport. We would stay at the edge of the tarmac (yes you could do that in those days) and watch her board. We stayed and stayed. We would wave as we tried to see her through the tiny plane windows. Then we watched as the plane taxied away, down the runway until it lifted off the ground and soared in the sky overhead. No amount of coaxing got us to move until the plane was completely out of sight. Even though she could no longer see us, we waved and repeated over and over good-bye Gammer...bye Gammer.

Then we would be teary as we walked back to the car and drove home. We loved her—I loved her. I wanted her to stay forever. She said she would be back but it still hurt to see her go. Even though I thought she was super human one day the inevitable final goodbye came. Life would be different without her. My siblings and I will always remember the impact she had on us and to this day we still tell her story.

If we have such feelings when an important person in our lives leaves us, imagine how devastating it must have been for Jesus' Apostles to watch him ascend into heaven; speechless, eyes wide, staring for what probably seemed forever even after Jesus was no longer in sight, unable to even formulate an utterance; realizing he was really gone this time and wondering: what now? Life was going to be different without Jesus. In all their imaginings they probably could not have imagined how different.

Of course Jesus knew this would be a really difficult time for his disciples so he provided immediate help in the form of two men who were "suddenly" there. They basically told the bewildered Apostles, "It's time to go".

On the day he ascended, Jesus gave his disciples:

** A promise, "I will be back". (...This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven...)

** Hope, "I will give you the power you need". (...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you...)

** An assignment, "you will be witnesses of me ... to the ends of the earth".

And he gave them something else. All the while that he was with them he was teaching them, readying them for this moment—the moment he would leave behind his physical presence. The most important gift he gave them that day was something they already had; each other. Listen to his words in our Gospel today:

"Holy Father, protect them in your name that you have given me, so that they may be one, as we are one". ...So that in the name [of Jesus] they may be one.

The accounts of Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension were not written down for pastime reading pleasure. The writers are following Jesus' last assignment: "...to be witnesses of him to the ends of the earth." They were also inspired to write for another reason. Not only are they recounting the life and teachings of Jesus as a continuing witness, but they are also building up the faith of those who never knew Jesus. They are companions and mentors of those who came after, they are our companions—our mentors.

I am grateful for the mentoring of those early Christian writers who preserved that sacred story. They remind followers of Jesus (Us) that he was a real physical person who lived on Earth—not a mythological being such as the Greeks and Romans made up or some other fantasy. Their writings give encouragement, instruction, guidance, reflection and admonition on how to live together and how **that** is the witness Jesus was talking about. They remind Christians that the assignment is on-going, never ending; share the Good News of Jesus Christ to the ends of the Earth—be witnesses.

Christians today are to continue the work Jesus began; the work he passed on to his Apostles and disciples. And like them, we know that we do not do this alone. We, too, have the gifts Jesus gave at his ascension.

Next week we will celebrate in remembrance the first gift—that of the Holy Spirit. Then we have the companionship and mentorship of all the Apostles and disciples passed down to us through the centuries. And we have our own modern day companionship with one another. This is so that by our lives which we live together as one with Christ and in Christ, we too are witnesses of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Now **we** have become the companions and mentors for the future church—future Christians.

Jesus Christ is the embodiment of Love. And Love cares for all things—all creatures; which is the sum of the covenant we make at our baptism.

The Good News of Jesus Christ is the love his follower, his disciples, and his Apostles bring to a world filled with violence and hate. It is the balance—the justice that gives hope where hope is lacking.

“Do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that is taking place...” the Apostle Peter admonishes. It is bound to happen. And life will be different after each “fiery” ordeal. Let us remember **this** day we have all the tools, all the power we need to carry out our assignment from our risen Lord; always remembering that Holy Spirit is with us, whispering in our ears—making ever-relevant that assignment of spreading the Good News to all the corners of the world.

Let us be Love in the power of the Holy Spirit! Alleluia!